

people's interests

HR NEWSLETTER • MARCH 2011

The gift of feedback

Feedback is a way to let people know how effective they are in what they are trying to accomplish, or how they impact or affect you. It provides a way for us to learn and understand how we impact on those around us and it helps us to become more effective. There may be a difference between how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us; if there is, getting feedback will enable us to narrow that gap. Of course, there are two sides to feedback: giving it, and receiving it.

The person giving the feedback will have spent time, energy and given some thought to the feedback they want to give you and why they want to give it to you. Very few people set out with the intention of upsetting others and it is therefore likely that they will also have your interests at heart, especially if they know you well and care about you as a friend and/or colleague.

Some people hold the view that feedback is just criticism and therefore don't like or want to hear it. Others have a more extreme view and see it as spiritually crushing; a confirmation of their worthlessness, if you like. Some others only want to hear praise, but nothing that might suggest imperfection or a need to change.

Of course, that's not the case for everyone. Many people are willing to accept feedback and some even seek it out, even if it is sometimes disturbing, largely because they believe they can grow from it and become more effective.

I guess that it comes down to whether you believe feedback will harm you or benefit you. That's not to say that we should always have to accept feedback or the manner in which it is sometimes given. We all have the right to refuse feedback, and we should expect feedback to be given in a respectful and supportive manner. But let's also not forget that we have a choice about the feedback we receive, the choice about what to do with it and whether or not to take any action at all. As the anonymous quote below says ...

"If one person says that you are a horse, smile at them. If two people say that you are a horse, give it some thought. If three people say you are a horse, go out and buy a saddle."

My suggestion would be to think carefully about the gifts of feedback that you give and about how and where you deliver them and, for those receiving gifts of feedback, be grateful to the giver, if you're not, they may not bother next time and you could end up losing out in the long run!

The following pointers can guide you in the process of giving constructive feedback.

Step one – Maintain their self esteem – Before giving feedback, you must ensure that the other person is in a receptive frame of mind.

Step Two – Refer to a specific situation – For feedback to be effective, you must discuss a real and recent situation.

Step three – Discuss why something was not so effective – Explain your view of the situation.

Step Four – Find a better way of doing it – Jointly develop or suggest an action plan.

Final note – Ensure the other person is left in a positive mood and feeling confident that they have the ability to improve things.

Extract from an article by Martin Smith, Freelance Learning and Development Consultant, www.martin-smith.biz, who courteously gave us permission to reproduce his work.



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